

BOOK REVIEW

RICHARD STEPHEN FELGER AND BENJAMIN THEODORE WILDER (in collaboration with Humberto Romero-Morales). 2012. **Plant Life of a Desert Archipelago: Flora of the Sonoran Islands in the Gulf of California.** (ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-0243-1, hbk.). The University of Arizona Press, P.O. Box 210055, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0055, U.S.A. (**Orders:** uapress.arizona.edu, 1-800-621-2736). \$65.00, 624 pp. (incl. 8-page color inset), 388 species accounts with paired distribution maps, hundreds of line drawings and photos, 8 ½" × 11", 3.7 pounds.

The natural history of this region is natural history brought to life and almost animated for you in this superb compendium of information on the Gulf Islands. Anyone working in this region, in any discipline, from beginner to expert, will be delighted by the wealth of detailed information written with heart, cheer, and energy, lighting up the rich human and biological history of this very special region of the world.

This book is packed with rich tales of an island chain almost untouched by invasive plants, with a modern history of many peoples sharing the rich biological resources. Almost every page has a picture, and albeit in black and white, the images and the diverse objects throughout the book leave you yearning to give them color and visit the islands for yourself.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the book is the quality of the science behind it, the precision in every story and record and every dot on each map. The authors are meticulous scholars, and every detail has been carefully researched, yet this in no way detracts from the readability. This book is a masterpiece in its ability to be both a thoroughly enjoyable read and a scientific encyclopedia.

Felger took his first trip in 1954, and anyone familiar with Felger's attention to detail will instantly know the quality of this work. Wilder became involved a half-century later in 2005, and his focused studies in recent years bring a contemporary energy to this mammoth volume.

The preface and foreword are both passionately written and convey the very personal connections of the authors to the region. **Part 1—The Islands and Their Vegetation** is an introduction to the geology, biology, ethnobotany, and natural history. It includes a section on invasive species and a section on administration and conservation that boasts a photo of big-horn sheep being moved by helicopter in 2008! **Part 2—Botanical Explorations on the Sonoran Islands: Collectors, Associates, and Selected Personalities** is a delightful compendium of accounts documenting people who have lived and worked in the region. It is packed with tales of adventure and travels in the gulf, giving rich insights into the lives of the big names in gulf biology. **Part 3—The Flora** contains the species accounts, the heart of the research. Each species has a distribution map, and there are many great illustrations, packed with stellar detailed-yet-easily-digestible text. It includes keys to species and the Seri plant names and uses in many cases, often provided by collaborator Humberto Romero-Morales of the Seri nation. And anyone working in the region or researching its history will enjoy the detailed place names in **Part 4—The Gazetteer** as well as the following useful appendices: **Appendix A: Checklist of the Flora of the Sonoran Islands** (summarizing knowledge for each island); **Appendix B: Species Mutually Absent from Isla Tiburón and Mainland Sonora** (an unusual and interesting addition to this volume, almost a watch-list for what might arrive or be found in future); and **Appendix C: Botanical Name Changes**. Lastly, the index and literature cited are exhaustive and excellent.

This book is a must-have for anyone working in the area, but it's also a treasure for anyone that just wishes they were there, a doorway into the magic of the region through the pages of a book.—*Sula Vanderplank, PhD, Biodiversity Explorer, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.*